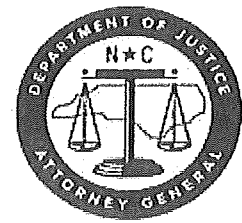


## State of North Carolina

Roy Cooper  
Governor



Josh Stein  
Attorney General

January 22, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary of the Interior  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Re: 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We write to ask that you protect our state's coast by withdrawing your proposed offshore drilling program. We also write to advise you that, if necessary, we will take all appropriate legal action to protect North Carolina jobs and natural resources.

You recently promised that the Department of the Interior, under your leadership, will "listen to the voices of communities." You claimed, "We're the collaborative department. We want to work with local communities. We want to solve problems rather than create them."

We ask you to match your words with actions, because we are deeply concerned about the impact of your proposed offshore drilling program on the state of North Carolina. Your proposal puts in danger tens of thousands of jobs and the \$3 billion in annual revenue created by coastal tourism in North Carolina.

### ***Harm to North Carolina and its economy***

On August 17, 2017, North Carolina filed a public comment letter detailing the danger to our state from oil and gas drilling off our coast. That August 2017 letter is enclosed. Before sending the letter, our Department of Environmental Quality held three public hearings to solicit citizen input. At those hearings, the vast majority of speakers opposed offshore oil and gas development. Of the hundreds of written comments that we received, 97% opposed offshore drilling. Thirty coastal communities in our state have passed resolutions opposing drilling. Most recently, the commissioners in Brunswick County – which had been one of only two counties in the state that had announced support for offshore drilling – voted to rescind that earlier support.

North Carolina local communities are extremely – and rightly – concerned about offshore drilling because of the unique ecology and economy of North Carolina's coast. Tens of thousands of jobs depend on our coastal waters. In 2016, our state's commercial fishing industry supported an estimated 7,410 jobs and \$166 million of income. Recreational fishing supported an estimated 15,069 jobs and generated \$621 million in income; our coastal waters drew 1.4 million recreational anglers on 5.4 million trips. Tourism along our coast supports an additional 30,000 jobs. Visitors to our coast spent more than \$3 billion in 2015, including an estimated \$650 million in wages and tips.

Reports suggest that potential oil and gas developers could be most interested in a point near Cape Hatteras, a thriving tourist destination, the site of one of our state's most famous historic landmarks, and also a remarkably productive fisheries area.

North Carolina has 326 miles of ocean beaches and 2.3 million acres of estuarine waters, the second-largest estuarine complex in the continental United States. Because of its slow rate of water exchange, the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary is especially susceptible to damage from even small leaks and spills. Further, oil and gas development off our state's coastline poses unique dangers, including the possibility of destabilizing known underwater landslides off our shore; this increases the probability of an ecological disaster like the Deepwater Horizon spill.

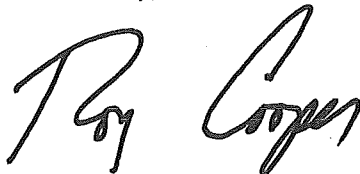
***We ask you to listen to the people of North Carolina***

Before the March 9, 2018 deadline, we intend to submit further, formal comments on your agency's Draft Proposed Program that detail the harm to North Carolina created by your proposal.

Your plans to permit offshore drilling off the North Carolina coast deeply affect the people of our state. Your process for developing and carrying out those plans has, so far, failed to listen to the people of North Carolina.

We urge you to reverse course and abandon your harmful plan to allow offshore drilling off North Carolina's coast. If you do not, we will oppose you vigorously, using all available legal tools.

Sincerely,



Roy Cooper



Josh Stein

Enclosure